

**Rhode Island Sanitary Sewer Overflow (SSO) Integrated Initiative**  
EPA Region 1-Boston

**Description of activity:** In January, 2007, the United States Environmental Protection Agency-Region 1, in collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Protection (RI DEM), launched the Rhode Island Sanitary Sewer Overflow (SSO) Integrated Initiative. This effort utilizes a tailored combination of enforcement and technical assistance and outreach tools to address the problem of sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) in Rhode Island.

SSOs are caused by the breakdown in the system of pipes, pumps and other equipment that municipalities and wastewater utilities use to collect and transport sewage to a wastewater treatment plant. When an SSO occurs, raw sewage is released from the wastewater collection system and may end up in streets, basements or surface waters. Discharges of untreated sewage from SSOs are a significant cause of water quality violations in New England and elsewhere around the country.

The integrated approach in Rhode Island is unique because it relies on a combination of tools tailored to encourage specific short and long term behavior changes by Rhode Island communities. EPA and RI DEM intend through their collective efforts to eliminate all SSOs in Rhode Island and to assist communities with the development of long-term operation, maintenance and investment plans to ensure that communities are equipped to develop sustainable water infrastructure systems.

In early 2007, all Rhode Island communities received a letter from Region 1 and RI DEM alerting them to the enforcement (with a focus on the issuance of Administrative Orders) and technical assistance resources (with a focus on workshops, on site assistance, development of a preventative maintenance manual, GIS/mapping support and website) that would be focused in Rhode Island. This letter to chief officials in each municipality and to operations officials at the departments of public works and the waste water treatment plant managers encouraged recipients to take advantage of the technical assistance which EPA is offering as part of this effort. EPA has also actively sought to partner with regional water trade associations and collection systems.

In May, 2007, Region 1 won an EPA HQ Performance Evaluation Competition and received approximately \$85,000 in contractor support to evaluate the project. Region 1 has identified eight performance measures with associated performance indicators that it will track and evaluate over the next 24 months. This evaluation will ultimately enable the region to determine which aspects of the original project to transfer to other states within the region.

**Interagency partner:** Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

**Activity URL:** [www.epa.gov/ne/sso/ri](http://www.epa.gov/ne/sso/ri)



Overflowing manholes in a Rhode Island parking lot